

# Featured Plant

**Common Name:** Sideoats Grama  
**Scientific Name:** *Bouteloua curtipendula*  
(boo-te-LOO-uh kurt-ih-PEN-dyoo-luh)



Kyle Spencer

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Sideoats grama, the largest of the grama grasses, is a native, warm-season perennial grass from 1 to 3 feet in height. It is distinguished by oat-like seed spikelets that hang from one side of the seed stalk. Spikelets are orange to dark-red in color when in flower. Leaves are a bluish-green color, sometimes with a purplish cast, and cure to a reddish-brown or straw color. A distinctive characteristic of the leaves are sparse, long, stiff hairs that grow from tiny glands along the edge of the leaf. This grass can produce stout rhizomes, but primarily grows in bunches and reproduces mostly by seed. Growth begins in spring and plants remain green through the summer. Flowering occurs typically from July thru September.

Sideoats grama occurs throughout most of North America and parts of South America. It is typically found on open slopes, woodlands and forest openings up to 7,000 feet in elevation. It is fairly drought-tolerant and prefers rocky, shallow soils within its range. This grass occurs throughout Arizona but is most abundant in the southern half of the state.

Sideoats grama is an excellent forage for all classes of livestock and many other herbivores. It remains moderately palatable with relatively good nutritional value into winter. It is somewhat less palatable than blue grama and is also less tolerant of heavy grazing than blue grama due to its taller growth habit. Sideoats grama is used as an ornamental, especially in xeric landscaping.

Sideoats grama is best established if the seed is planted no more than ½-inch deep. Most guidelines recommend deferring grazing until after the second growing season following establishment. The grass will tolerate and respond well to light to moderate intensity fires.

Notes of Interest: Sideoats grama is the state grass of Texas. It is listed as threatened or endangered in some eastern states. The Lakota call this grass wapaha kamminilla peji, or “banner waving in the wind grass.” Grama is a Spanish term for “coarse grass.”

# Featured Bird

**Common Name:** Scott's Oriole  
**Scientific Name:** *Icterus parisorum*



Dan L. Fischer

Dan L. Fischer, Author of *Early Southwest Ornithologists, 1528-1900*, University of Arizona Press

With the coming of spring, several birds return from Mexico that are quite conspicuous because of their striking plumage. Among those are the orioles, so named because of their similarity to a European group named from Modern Latin meaning “golden.” Two of the three common orioles that return to Arizona have this rich eye-catching “golden” appearance that brings attention to their plumage, while the third displays an appealing rich lemon yellow.

The brilliant male Scott's Oriole, as shown here in breeding plumage, is strongly marked with a jet black head, throat, neck, back, tail, and most of the wings which also show distinctive white stripes. The remaining plumage is offset from the black by a bright lemon yellow on the breast, lower base of the tail and shoulders. Their sharp, clearly whistled song, often heard well before being observed, is sung throughout the nesting season.

Their summer residence in Arizona occurs from the drier deserts well up into oaks, pinyon pines and juniper woodlands with nesting beginning in mid-April. They feed primarily on insects and nectar and are often associated with several species of yucca. Three or four lovely pale blue eggs blotched, or streaked, with darkish brown are laid generally in a small woven suspended nest of yucca or other plant fibers and lined with soft grasses in dense foliage of a plant or tree. The rather drab-olive

to grayish-yellow female bird solely incubates the eggs for about 14 days while the male remains nearby to later aid in feeding the young.

Several young naturalists emerged as a result of the war between Mexico and the United States that occurred from 1846 to 1848, followed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and then the subsequent U.S. – Mexican Boundary Survey. In the concluding phase of the conflict, General in Chief of the Army Winfield Scott entered the field and personally directed the march to Mexico City. Among the officers that served under the general was Lt. Darius Nash Couch (1822-1897), who collected a beautiful oriole near Nuevo León which he believed to be a new species. Having a “high regard” for the general, he named it (*Icterus scottii*) in honor of his commander, who, because of his excessive ceremonial dress had earned him the label of “Fuss and Feathers” by his troops. The scientific name Couch gave proved to be invalid as it had been named seventeen years earlier by the nephew of Napoleon, Charles Bonapart, a serious student of birds visiting America. The common name of the bird, however, still stands. Couch was so taken by the natural history of Mexico that he took a leave of absence from the army to study the region and some of his collections were added to the “Birds of the Boundary.” Couch later became a general during the Civil War.